Women of Bronx Pack the Meeting and Win

Precedent Smashingly Set Aside, and Argument of the Antis Shattered for All Time

Determine on a House-cleaning; Oust Knewitz and Elect Lawrence Republican Chairman

This is a picture of the meeting in The Bronx, which the Republican women "packed." They arrived early, and from the start made it clear that things were to go their way. The men had bungled long enough. True, the meeting turned into a riot and had to be adjourned, but the women carried the day and were successful in electing the man on whom they had set their hearts

By Denis Tilden Lynch

FOR the better part of the six years during which John J. Knewitz led the Republicans in The Bronx there was a well defined group of men in the party who believed that its guidance could be in better hands.

These men met from time to time and talked of possible successors to Chairman Knewitz, and talked of ways and means of deposing him. And they generally did most of their talking about this time of the year, when the county committees of all parties throughout the state are reorganized in accordance with law. And they first began talking and planning in 1915, just before Leader Knewitz came up for reëlection for the third time. And their talking and planning ended in—the reëlection of Knewitz. So again in 1916 they talked and planned, and 1917 found them still at it, and in 1918 they continued their talking and planning.

It was in 1918 that women in this state exercised their newly conferred privilege of suffrage for the first time. And the women of The Bronx went out to the polling booths and enrolled. And 12,460 women enrolled as Republicans, which, when compared with their male partisans, who were enrolled only to the extent of 17,177, was a very creditable showing. Then the Republican women of The Bronx anxiously awaited the returns of election day, which, when scanned, showed that the Republican vote had not increased in proportion.

They Got Busy

The women went out and asked questions. They were told by the old foes of Knewitz that the trouble was that the local Republican organization was not sufficiently militant; that it was inclined to friendly intercourse with the enemy. They asked more questions. They were then informed that Mr. Knewitz held a $5,000-a-year job as Commissioner of Records, by grace of The Bronx wing of the Tammany machine. Not that Knewitz wasn't discharging his duties ably and rendering the public excellent service. That wasn't the point. The women were out to try their power. What did matter was that he had accepted a political office from Democrats. No one could argue that away. And the women decided, it simply wasn't to be stood for.

And the women decided, furthermore, that what was principally needed was a housecleaning. And they, too, talked and planned, as the men before them had talked and planned. But with this difference: that the talking and planning of the women culminated very rapidly in the forced abdication of Mr. Knewitz and the election of Richard W. Lawrence in his stead.

After the women deposed Knewitz—with the aid of the men, it must be admitted, for they were numerically unable to do it alone—they made the housecleaning thorough and elected an entire new staff of assistants to aid Chairman Lawrence in directing the destinies of the county organization.

But these things were not accomplished without a struggle that was without precedent in New York politics. It had many of the attributes of an old-fashioned melodrama—intrigue and counter intrigue, a riot in the second act, and, of course, the last scene was in keeping with the best traditions of Drury Lane.

What happened in The Bronx shattered one of the principal arguments advanced by anti-suffragists—that women in politics would be unwitting dupes of the more experienced politicians of the sterner sex. For the Republican women of that county, in their fight against Knewitz, displayed a thorough knowledge of the essential subtleties of the game and an ability to apply them. When it is remembered that the women had less than a year in which to learn through practical experience, their showing was remarkable. And, in fairness to all concerned, it must be said that if there are any dupes among Bronx Republicans, none is of the feminine gender.

Wasn't Scared

Knewitz and his followers were aware of the feeling of the women toward him. But he declined to recognize the situation as menacing. A view which was shared by his kitchen cabinet, thus proving that there are men still who do not hold with Kipling that the female of the species is more deadly than the male.

The principal grievance of the women was that they were denied a proportionate voice in party management. Then, too, they credited the story in circulation that Knewitz had called them cats and old hens. They made no secret of their intentions, for they told all who cared to listen that they would supplant Knewitz by a chairman who would not call them old hens and cats and who would give them suitable recognition.

Similar threats had reached the ears of Knewitz in other years, and he regarded what had happened before as an augury of what would happen again. But he failed to consider that in other years he had only to deal with a disaffection wholly masculine.

Conscious of the opposition, but confident of its defeat, Knewitz issued the call for the annual meeting of the county committee the night of September 12. The appointed place was the North Side Republican Club. The assembly room of the organization comfortably seats less than 300, or less than half of the membership of the county committee, which is composed of 648. It is traditional that on the average less than half of a political organization's membership will attend the meetings. Relying on this, Knewitz and his cabinet believed that the seating capacity would be more than ample to take care of those who would attend. There is also a tradition in politics that, regardless of the hour set, no one will put in an appearance before 9 o'clock.

Packed

The women shattered both these traditions. They were in their seats before 8 o'clock, along with the bulk of the men who were opposed to Knewitz. This was in keeping with an agreement secretly entered into a few days before. And when Knewitz and his followers appeared upon the scene at the usual time they found that there was not space enough left in the room to hold half the late comers. Then it dawned upon the Knewitz faction that the women had resorted to a trick as old as politics. They had packed the meeting.

There was nothing left for Knewitz and his followers to do but carry out the purpose of the call, or at least to make an effort. Accordingly, one of the faithful placed in nomination for county chairman Mr. Knewitz.

This was the signal for a storm of protest. One woman, standing on her chair, declaimed loudly and frequently that Knewitz had called the gentler sex an aggregation of cats and old hens. Other feminine voices informed Mr. Knewitz in equally vigorous tones that they did not want him under any circumstances, while some of the men shouted that he had helped to elect Mayor Hylan. Some of the opposition, who wanted James Milligan as a successor, placed his name in nomination. Some one on the platform cried that the nominations were closed, and then from the opposition came a mighty roar of defiance, and cries of "Steam roller!" were heard above the hubbub.

In an instant the meeting had become a riot. Men on opposing sides pushed their chairs aside and made for one another. A couple of hundred who were outside the room surged in a compact mass toward the centre of trouble. More chairs were pushed over and some were lifted high on head as weapons. A few women fainted. Most of them kept their wits together, and were as cool half an hour later, when the riot ceased, as they were when they first entered the room.

It was obvious that an orderly meeting that night was impossible, so an adjournment was taken until the following week. Knewitz, in the mean time, declared that he had the votes, and until the evening of the adjourned day was for going through with his original programme to reëlect not only himself, but the entire old ticket.

He Withdraws

But at the last moment Knewitz had a change of heart, and when the meeting was called to order a motion was put and carried to reopen the nominations for county chairman. Then Knewitz withdrew from the race.

A cheer went up from the opposition, and there was applause from Knewitz's followers.

Next, Lawrence was placed in nomination. The faction of the opposition who wanted Milligan elected shouted that Lawrence was a stalking-horse for Knewitz. Lawrence, who manages a big piano industry and is head of the Young Men's Christian Association in The Bronx, and long identified with civic betterment movements, indignantly denied this. He was eventually chosen by a 5 to 1 vote.

When the rest of the ticket had been elected some of the women demanded that one of their sex be elected as a co-chairman. When it was pointed out that under the rules this could only be done at a special meeting, the women demanded that this special meeting be called. The new leader assured them that all could expect a square deal from him. This satisfied the women, and they are now awaiting the fulfilment of the promise.

Knewitz has been silent on his abdication, except to observe that it was not forced by the women, but was done voluntarily in the interest of party harmony. But his friends—and he has many—have been more communicative. They regret that he did not make a denial of the charges uttered by the women at the first meeting, which ended in a riot, for to them he has said that at no time had he characterized the women as cats and old hens, or used any other offensive language toward them. And they declare that his withdrawal was, as he explained it, in the interest of party harmony. To this they add that had he said the word he could have been reelected. Naturally enough, the opposition scoff at this, and insist that had Knewitz gone to a vote he would have been defeated.

All this, however, is water gone over the dam. The new leader, who was elected by a vote of 400 to 87, has started a campaign to reunite the warring factions.

"The task before me is to build up the party here in The Bronx," said Chairman Lawrence. "Our purpose will be to bring into the organization men and women of Republican sympathies. And the women, both within the party and those whom we expect to bring into it, can be assured of a square deal. What we are trying to do is to build up a corps of active party workers, who shall be representative of the entire party. There shall be no discrimination shown, and we are going to avoid anything savoring of professional leadership. There are rival ambitions to be dealt with, and this is no easy matter to handle. We are now making a survey of the situation, and when it is completed and our plan is submitted to the rank and file of the party, it will meet with their approval. What we are striving for is to unite all on a constructive programme. And I am confident our efforts will be successful."

The new chairman has just turned forty. He has been too busy to think of public office, but he has given no small part of his time to his party since he attained his majority. At twenty-one he was an election district captain. For nearly a dozen years he has been a delegate to Republican state conventions, and for the last few years he has acted as treasurer of the county committee. In the 1913 and 1917 mayoralty contests he represented The Bronx on the Fusion committee.

His business experience has taught him the value of advertising, and he is now at work on a publicity programme to aid him in his endeavor to make The Bronx a stronghold of Republicanism.

Colonel Roosevelt Knew the Blackfeet Wigwag

New proof of the marvellous versatility of Colonel Roosevelt comes to us from Arthur Nevin, who, in this article, tells of an unexpected proficiency in the difficult art of Indian sign language. Arthur Nevin, it is interesting to note, is a brother of Ethelbert Nevin. He has composed many songs, besides piano and orchestral works, and wrote the Indian opera "Poia," which was produced in 1910 at the Royal Opera, Berlin. Since 1915 Mr. Nevin has been professor of music at the University of Kansas.

By Arthur Nevin

PROBABLY every author who has written about Theodore Roosevelt has paid tribute to his versatility, but I will wager that few, if any, of them knew that he had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Indian sign language and could "converse" in it. One of the pleasantest and most vivid memories of my life is of a visit to the White House, when President Roosevelt carried on a conversation with me in the sign language of the Blackfeet Indians. I was astounded and delighted at this exhibition.

My visit was made in April, 1907, in response to an invitation from President Roosevelt to give an explanatory talk, with musical illustrations on the piano, of my Indian opera, "Poia," which I had recently finished. This opera was based upon a legend of the Blackfeet Indians of Montana.

It was to obtain the material and background for this work that I lived with the Blackfeet, the most primitive of any tribe in the United States. They hold to the customs and traditions of generations long since dead.

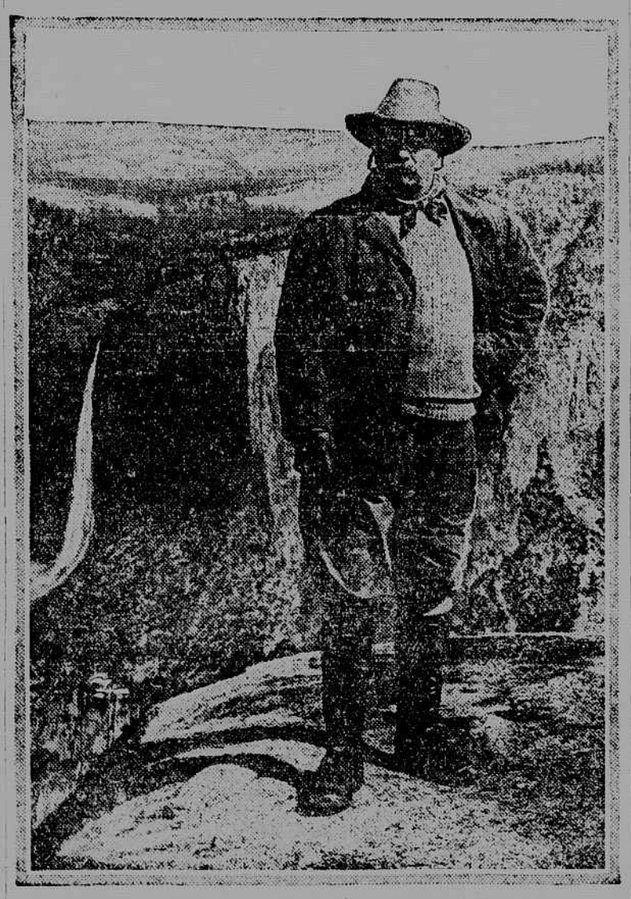
As I explained to Mr. Roosevelt, I became known to these people by the Indian term, Kutianaantsi, the literal translation being Never-Tie-His-Moccasin-Strings. This name was not given me by reason of an implied neglect, but because I resembled a departed brave who bore it.

I told the President of the sun dance, the greatest event of the year to the Indians. It is a ceremony that covers four days. During this period every hour brings forth some episode of the service that is of intense interest. This religious feast is given by a squaw, and is the outcome of a vow she has made to her god, the sun. Should any one dear to her be in danger or distress she prays to the sun to protect and deliver him; she vows that she will fast for forty days and nights, and then offers sacrifices to the sun god (Natosi) as an evidence of her faith and thankfulness.

At this sun dance I met a chief by the name of Big Moon. We took a fancy to each other and became fast friends. He told me the second day after our meeting that I was to be his paleface son, and gave me another name—Stem-e-a-ah-te-etchican, or Bull Shoe.

It was the last night of the sun dance that, seated in his wigwam, I heard the story of "Poia," the son of the Morning Star and the great prophet to the Blackfeet Indians. During that night I learned much about their religion; of their belief in the sun as the father, the moon as the mother and the morning star as the only son. I was filled with the beauty of the legend.

The entertainment at the White House was followed by a reception.



Colonel Roosevelt in the sort of setting which most delighted his heart

During my exposition of the opera President Roosevelt sat in the front row within fifteen feet of me and, as I described the story of Poia, the Indian prophet, interpolating the account with many anecdotes of the Blackfeet Indians and their strange customs, I felt myself throwing more energy into my talk than on any other occasion when I had lectured on the same subject. The reason for this was that I was delighted to encounter such genuine and sincere interest as the President showed. I had expected polite attention, but had not been talking long before I realized that the President was enthusiastic about it.

As I talked I was aware that the President's gaze was fastened upon me and his face wore an expression of absorbed interest. At the conclusion of my lecture I was presented to President Roosevelt, and, although I knew of his ubiquitous habits and had read his articles on travel and adventure, I was, nevertheless, astonished to encounter such exact knowledge of the Blackfeet Indians as he displayed. I was simply bowled over when he began to converse with me in the Indian sign language. At the beginning of this conversation with a President of the United States I was rather skeptical of his real knowledge of this method of communication. But if I was from Missouri the President certainly *showed me*, because he was almost as proficient as I, who had made a thorough study of it.

I remember very vividly the President's animation as we discussed the customs of the Indians. He was always enthusiastic in speaking of outdoor life, which he loved, and during our conversation he gesticulated frequently and smiled as I mentioned some particularly odd custom of the Indians. But it was always a tolerant and kindly smile; the smile of the man who could see the other fellow's point of view, even if he happened to be an Indian. I remember after he had smiled at one episode he quickly became serious and remarked: "We must look at these things from their standpoint. Probably some of our customs might be equally amusing to them."

I carried away from that wonderful evening an abiding impression of Colonel Roosevelt's energy, enthusiasm and sincere interest in all the subjects that we discussed. I never before or since have met a man whose conversation was so replete with charm.

Knowing what a tremendously busy man the President was I was naturally delighted to receive from him a couple of months later a most cordial letter. This letter, which reached me in Berlin, Germany, where my opera was first produced on April 23, 1910, expressed the President's appreciation of my talk. Mr. Roosevelt also congratulated me upon the results of my two summers spent with the Blackfeet.

Command of English

Dr. Torrey, the evangelist, in speaking of missionary work, remarked: "Teaching the heathen must be most difficult of all. Just think—first you must teach them the language before you can even lay the foundation for a knowledge of God. The task reminds me of a missionary friend of mine who was working among the Indians. One of his pupils came to him one day and informed him that a sparrow had built a nest in the cross trees of his lodge. 'Is there anything in the nest yet?' asked the missionary. 'Heap much,' said the Indian, proud of his English. 'The sparrow has puppies.'"—The Argonaut.